



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF
FISH AND GAME
COMMERCIAL FISHERIES DIVISION

MEMORANDUM

Staff Comments on Board generated Proposal C: General District for Bristol Bay Salmon Fishery for 2004

PROPOSAL C, PAGE X: 5 AAC 06.XXX. GENERAL DISTRICT MANAGEMENT PLAN.

WHAT WOULD THE PROPOSAL DO? This proposal seeks to establish a General District Management Plan for the 2004 season to respond to the large forecasted sockeye salmon run to Bristol Bay. The General District would be an additional fishing area outside the existing terminal districts extending southward to the latitude of Cape Menshikof. The intent of this proposal is to harvest sockeye salmon earlier, prior to their arrival in the terminal districts, thereby expanding industry's ability to process more sockeye over the entire season.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT REGULATIONS? There are currently no regulations defining a General District or otherwise specifying fishing periods in a General District.

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ADOPTED? An additional area, outside the existing terminal districts, extending south to the latitude of Cape Menshikof would be opened beginning June 7. The area would be opened either continuously or fixed weekly schedules between June 7 and on or about June 25. Drift permit holders would be required to register (drop blue card) for one of the regular districts in Bristol Bay in order to participate in the General District fishery; the 48-hour waiting period would be waived to transfer between the General District and the regular district for which the permit holder was registered. The normal 48-hour waiting period would apply to transfers between the regular fishing districts. A harvest cap of 3.5 million sockeye salmon (10% of the projected 2004 Bristol

Bay harvest) would be in effect for the General District. No set gillnet fishing would occur in the General District, however, the terminal districts (at least the Naknek-Kvichak, Egegik and Ugashik Districts) would be open for both gear types concurrently with the General District.

BACKGROUND: The General District concept is not original; it was done by regulation in 1970 and by emergency order in 1980; both in response to large forecasted runs to Bristol Bay. In 1970, the results were relatively poor with only 360,000 sockeye taken in the General District, which was open from June 8 through June 30 with continuous fishing after June 15. In 1980, with the General District open from June 9 through late July, the resulting harvest was 1.5 million sockeye with a price dispute holding effort to a minimum. It was felt that the General District was successful that year and could have been more successful had it not been for the strike. Catch records from 1980 indicate that the peak periods in the General District occurred on or after June 27.

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The department is **NEUTRAL** regarding this board-generated proposal. The department feels that although fishing in this area will result in harvest of several different stocks of sockeye salmon, the harvest cap of 3.5 million is conservative relative to the harvestable surplus forecasted to return to each of the river systems in Bristol Bay. Based on the prior experience with the General District, it is unlikely that fishing in this area will impact any one particular stock.

That being said, the department remains cognizant of the fact that the Kvichak sockeye salmon are a stock of management concern, having failed to meet minimum escapement goals for several consecutive years; the preseason forecast has had varying degrees of accuracy in the past and a conservative approach to the harvest of Kvichak sockeye is desirable until run strength can be adequately assessed. At the same time, the department is also aware that there is the likelihood of 8+ million sockeye salmon that could go unharvested due to limited processing capacity and become excess escapement in the river systems of Bristol Bay.

COST ANALYSIS: There may be additional fuel and insurance costs for a private person to participate in the General District drift gillnet fishery if adopted due to increased travel and the potentially longer season.